



Katrin Boeckh. *Von den Balkankriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Kleinstaatenpolitik und ethnische Selbstbestimmung auf dem Balkan.* München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996. 418 pp. DM 120,00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-56173-9.

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The Year After the Balkan Wars

The First and Second Balkan Wars concluded the long expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans, and its replacement by Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro. In 1913, no one foresaw that within another year, those states would be caught up in two world wars, a Cold War, and seventy-five years of recurring crises. Rather, 1913 appeared to signal full independence for the Balkan peoples, now free to follow their own road. Katrin Boeckh's study examines the tantalizing traces of that road, as the Balkan states began it during a brief era cut short by World War I.

A few well-regarded books dominate study of the Balkan Wars, from E. C. Helmreich[1] to Andre Rossos.[2] Boeckh departs from these studies in three ways. First, she focuses on the aftermath of the fighting, rather than the wars themselves. Second, she examines the domestic politics, societies, and economies of the Balkan states, with minimal attention to the Great Powers. Third, she emphasizes the negative consequences of the Balkan Wars for national development.

The book begins with a summary of diplomatic and military events in 1912 and 1913, and the treaty negotiations that dragged on into 1914. The core of Boeckh's study follows: a narrative and critique of domestic politics, administrative measures, and economic policies in the postwar months. Her description is richest for Serbia, followed by Greece and Bulgaria, with modest coverage of Montenegro. Shorter sections cover population movements during and after the wars, the religious politics of

the peace settlements, the plight of stateless minorities (Macedonians, Jews and Vlachs or "Aromunen"), and the implications of the peace in foreign relations. The book makes limited reference to Romania and the small territories it gained, except as factors in alliance politics. The text is supported by indices of persons and places, a short glossary, thirteen tables, and seven maps drawn for this work. An extensive bibliography cites archival and secondary sources.

Boeckh disputes the frequently repeated thesis that the Balkan Wars had an immediate and positive effect on the development of the Balkan states (p. 381). She questions how the historic mission of uniting all co-nationals in a common state was achieved, when that mission left the welfare of the individual subordinated to the needs of the state (pp. 117-18). The 1913 report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace[3] documented wartime atrocities, but the harsh conduct of the peace has been largely neglected. Curtailed religious freedom, the closing of schools, mass expulsions and occasional murders accompanied "Serbisierung," "Grzisierung," and a general homogenization of unwanted national minorities across the conquered districts (p. 227). The burdens of occupying the new lands affected all citizens, and not unwanted minorities alone. The belligerent nations had already paid a heavy price in blood and treasure, and continued to pay thanks to guerilla unrest, commercial disruptions, and expensive foreign loans. The ascendancy of military government in the new lands undermined habits of civil authority,

constitutional structures, and the security of persons and property.

Boeckh argues that the Great Powers contributed to these trends through a general abdication of responsibility. When it became clear that the Balkan League was beyond control, the Powers adopted policies based on their own narrowest interests, and continued to do so during the peace, washing their hands of all but a few projects such as establishing neutral Albania.

Rather than supply definitive answers, Boeckh's ambitious project suggests intriguing questions for additional, complementary research. Comprehensive treatment is beyond a single volume and could require materials in a dozen languages. Besides German and English, Boeckh comfortably employs the Slavic languages, but makes far less use of Greek and Romanian sources, to say nothing of Turkish or Albanian. She has consulted archives in Bonn, Vienna, Munich, London, and Moscow, but too many Balkan archives remain unavailable. While her thesis revolves around the significance and autonomy of actions by and within the Balkan states, Boeckh has relied on unpublished foreign ministry archives of the Great Powers for much of her primary evidence, supplemented by published Balkan materials. Even her newspaper sources are drawn primarily from outside the region.

Beyond these problems with sources and despite her main thesis, Boeckh's analysis also slips into conventions that conflate the state and national identity more than would be desired by scholars specializing on problems of identity. She adopts a convention common to diplomatic historians, by which states, regimes and nations act, overshadowing distinct personalities. Thus we read often of Greece and Belgrade but seldom of Venizelos and Pasic. The era boasted colorful and charismatic statesmen: given the passions and intrigues at work, one misses some vivid evocation of domestic political give and take.

Boeckh also proceeds from thinly examined assumptions in treating ethnic identity and its construction, as in her handling of Macedonian nationalism. She employs contemporary enumerations of ethnic groups with minimal questions about their origin or validity: for example Table 12, showing the 1912 ethnic population of the Vilayet of Saloniki based on Ottoman sources (p. 330). Boeckh admits that a portion of the Macedonian population was "indifferent" to national identity (p. 185), but does not ask whether their identity was unformed or

merely undisclosed. Serbian authorities (or their counterparts in Greece or Bulgaria) may have worked comfortably in a convenient world of 'Serbs' and 'Not-Serbs,' but many scholars of ethnicity mistrust the simplicity of such labels.

Reservations aside, Boeckh's work stimulates by its clever reexamination of a place and age—the Balkans on the eve of World War I—that often seems played out. She has posed herself a novel theme, then combed through hundreds of sources for revealing evidence obscured by war, time, and official secrecy. No longer dismissing 1913-14 as mere postlude or prologue, she uncovers important questions about the meaning of independence for the Balkan states, and suggests important answers.

Boeckh also reminds us that lapses in historical understanding have consequences. Writing during the new "Balkan wars" of the 1990s (this was a 1995 University of Munich doctoral dissertation), Boeckh notes that preparations for war, war aims, methods such as 'ethnic cleansing,' and the political representation ("publizistische Darstellungen") of events have altered very little since the prototypical Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 (p. 10). She begins her book by quoting Gustav Weigand on the value of inquiry without praise or blame (p. 11); she concludes it regretfully with a warning that until the Balkan peoples adequately and truthfully examine their own national histories, the defects of nationalism may return to trouble us (p. 386).

Notes:

[1]. E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938).

[2]. Andre Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy 1908-1914* (Toronto, 1981).

[3]. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C.: The Endowment, 1914); republished as *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993).

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